

All That's Wrong With the New Hollywood Film on the 'No Hell' Preacher

Charisma magazine writes, "At one point, Bishop Carlton Pearson pastored Higher Dimensions Family Church, a Pentecostal megachurch of over 5,000 people in Tulsa, Oklahoma. He was mentored by Oral Roberts and served on the board at Oral Roberts University. Then Pearson declared that he no longer believed in hell and preached what he called the 'gospel of inclusion.' As a result, he was forced to resign from ORU's board of regents and was deemed a heretic by his former peers. He traded his Pentecostal ministry for universalism.

"Pearson's story is now the subject of a new Hollywood film, *Come Sunday*, which premiered at the 2018 Sundance Film Festival."

I'm very familiar with this tragic story. When I attended Bible school in Tulsa in the early to mid-1980s, I'd periodically visit Pearson's church because I enjoyed his dynamic preaching. It shocked me to hear of how he'd become a universalist. In a movie clip, Pearson played by Chiwetel Ejiofor, asks one of the religious clerics in a court room-like scene, "If you could get your daddy out of hell, would you?" And then, "Are we more merciful than God?" implying that God's love and mercy will not allow anyone to go, or at least remain, in hell.

Come Sunday

The biggest tragedy in this film involves those who will believe its message. The issue of the 'no hell' universalist doctrine is not one of mercy in allowing sinners out of hell or refuting its existence altogether, but it is one of God's

eternal justice that has been forever settled by Scripture. The question should be: Is our sense of justice greater than God's?

It is because of God's holy and just nature that He by no means will clear the guilty (Ex. 34:7) (Num. 14:18) but must uphold and execute His law.

What would you think of a judge who did not uphold the Law? Sin is the transgression of the law (1 John 3:4). It is the transgression or the crime that must be penalized. What if your own daughter was violently raped or your son was murdered? Or your wife, husband, a mother or father? Would you not want justice served? What if a judge cleared the guilty because the criminal's good works outweighed his crime? Would that hold up in man's courtroom?

If such a system does not exist in man's courtroom, would it hold up in God's? This would not be mercy at all but the gravest of injustices. Yet people think that God's mercy will automatically forgive man's sin and allow guilty sinners entrance into heaven. Such an unscriptural mercy does not exist!

Anyone who suggests that God can show mercy while foregoing His justice is ignoring His holy and just nature and His law of sin and death. What kind of faith could we have in a God who ignores the laws He Himself established? What kind of hope and trust could we exercise toward a God like that who is fickle and whimsical and does not uphold His own Word?

God cannot disregard His own Word and His own laws. When it comes to sin, God cannot ever set aside His justice to show mercy. The soul that sins must die (Ezek. 18:20), and yet God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek. 33:11). This presents quite a dilemma. It is not an easy thing for God to clear the guilty. So the question is: Is there a basis by which God can maintain His justice while still extending mercy

to the sinner?

God's justice and mercy are not contradictory to each other, but they are complementary and in perfect balance. From the beginning of Adam's fall, the forgiveness of sins has not been a simple matter for a holy God. God cannot just show mercy to a sinner without the sinner's transgressions being punished and satisfied by the claims of justice. No earthly judge will do that. How much more just is our God? Here are three things that our perfectly loving God, who is infinitely holy and just, can never say to any man:

1. It's okay that you sinned: forget about it, I forgive you.
2. Because of My love, I won't judge you.
3. I don't love you anymore because you sinned.

Once again, God's love and justice do not oppose each other. God loves sinners and desires none to perish, but He must execute judgment and punishment on their sin. So the question rephrased again is:

How can a holy and righteous God extend mercy toward a guilty sinner while still upholding His justice?

Enter Jesus. Enter the cross. The beauty and majesty of the cross is that we see both the judgment and the mercy of God displayed there. God placed our sin on the sinless Son of God and satisfied the Father's justice while also granting us the free offer of salvation that satisfied His mercy. This is the love of God: His justice and mercy rolled up into one in order to redeem a sinful and disobedient people. God pronounced judgment on sin, but because of His love He paid for it Himself through His Son Jesus Christ.

God is both a Judge and a Savior who established a perfect righteousness. That is why the movie *Come Sunday* is a serious indictment against God's perfect character, and although the acting is admirable, the theme of the movie is most

despicable. God is not on trial. We are.

May God grant Carlton Pearson a revelation of God's perfectly holy and just nature and bring him to subsequent repentance, so that then he may understand, appreciate and receive God's true mercy.

"He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the just, both of them alike are an abomination to the Lord" (Prov. 17:15).

Understanding the character of God and the balance of God's holy and just nature and His love and mercy will help equip believers to share the gospel from a scriptural perspective, not based on sentiments or feelings. We cannot leave sinners relying on an unscriptural mercy. {eo}

For more on this theme, please refer to The Real Gospel.